

Neatness Does Count

Good housekeeping is at least as essential in the workplace as it is in your own home. When your workspace is clean, orderly, and free of obstructions, you can get the job done safely and properly. A messy work area, on the other hand, promotes accidents because it hides hazards. These hidden hazards can cause you and others illness and injury. Don't accept the sight of paper, debris, and spills as a normal working condition. If you consider this as normal you may begin to think of worse dangers as acceptable as well.

Effective housekeeping takes an ongoing effort, not just hit-and-miss attempts to clean up once in a while. Periodic cleanups aren't enough to reduce workplace accident rates. Don't begin a drive to clean up and then let things slide after a week or two. Set your work area in order and keep it that way. A lasting result is the only meaningful one.

While we are not expected to clean up for others unless that is the job we have been hired for, as adults we can help clean up after ourselves and keep our own work area neat and in order. That is an understood part of our job description. (On the other hand, it would not be very adult to notice a hazardous situation and do nothing about it just because it waists within our own area.)

Here are some specifics to be mindful of.

- Keep the floor around you clean and clear of waste. If your job is one in which debris is created, you can attend to the immediate floor area every once in a while as you work.
- Keep your workstation cleared of personal items such as clothing and lunch boxes. These should be stacked neatly in a locker or an assigned storage spot.
- Keep stairways, passages, and gangways free of obstructions. Don't place materials on the stairs or in aisles as you work. Bundle hoses and cables when not in use.
- Be aware of protruding nails, sharp corners, open cabinet drawers, and trailing electric wires in the work area. Either correct the unsafe condition if you are able and it is safe to do so, or notify the person responsible for overall maintenance of the space that something should be done.
- Wipe up spills as soon as they occur. Use proper procedures as described in the material safety data sheet if the substance is a hazardous one and put on any personal protective equipment that is required. Dispose of used rags or towels in the proper manner.
- Keep your tools and equipment clean and in good shape. If equipment is damaged, report it and follow up to make sure that the equipment has been adjusted before using it again. After finishing a job, place tools and unused materials in the spot where they belong.

Good housekeeping is also an important part of fire prevention. Make sure that you don't keep more combustible and flammable materials at your workstation than you need for the job at hand—and keep these liquids in safety cans. Place oily or greasy rags in metal containers. Place all other trash and scrap in the receptacles provided for them. Don't reach into waste containers—dump trash into another container or remove the bag.

It is also your responsibility to smoke only in designated areas and at designated times—if you must smoke at all—and to dispose of matches and butts in the receptacle provided.

Let working in an orderly fashion become second nature to you. It is one of the most important ingredients in doing things right and keeping yourself and others safe on the job.

